

STATEMENT OF  
TIMOTHY M. TETZ, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
NEVADA OFFICE OF VETERAN SERVICES  
TO THE  
ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS  
NEVADA STATE LEGISLATURE  
ON  
ASSEMBLY BILL 134

February 28, 2007

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Chairman Kirkpatrick and members of the Committee:

My name is Tim Tetz. I am the Executive Director of the Nevada Office of Veteran Services. I am here testifying to you today in favor of Assembly Bill 134. I'll loudly proclaim to anyone who will listen, the many challenges we have supporting Nevada's veterans through our daily activities. Serving Nevada's veterans and veterans organizations is an effort that has few boundaries but many rewards. AB134 would enable many of the activities we already do while further supporting our mission to care for those patriots who upheld the freedoms we cherish today.

The Nevada State Veteran's Service Commission and Office of Veteran Services began an awareness program this year where we are recognizing those veteran advocates who say thank you to a veteran. Not merely thank you in a verbal method, but through actions. Placing a flag on a veteran's grave is the very best way to say thank you. Thank you from a grateful nation.

One of the responsibilities of the Office of Veteran Services is to maintain and operate two state veterans' cemeteries in Fernley and Boulder City. Together, these two cemeteries interred over 2,000 veterans and their family members in 2006. Both serve as the central backdrop for Nevada's largest activities on Memorial Day, Veterans Day, and other patriotic holidays. Nothing is more stirring than entering the hallowed grounds of these facilities on such holidays and be overwhelmed by the sea of flags honoring our American heroes.

At our state veterans' cemeteries, AB134 will task us to do what we already accomplish and assist us to accomplish what volunteers fundraise for each year. Currently, any veteran buried in a national or state veterans' cemetery can be located through the VA grave locator website. This task is already supported at our facilities, and I personally believe something similar for all of Nevada's veterans would be the first of its kind and wonderful. Truly our limited staff could not accomplish this feat without the support and effort of many, but this bill would enable the mechanism for others to assist.

I want to warn you that this bill cannot go unfunded. The limited budget of the Office of Veterans Services cannot absorb the costs of thousands of flags and therefore, the heartfelt well-intentioned actions of your committee and the Nevada Legislature would fall short of the overall goal to honor our nation's veterans.

The Union veterans of the Civil War, some of whom are buried throughout Nevada, established Decoration Day almost 140 years ago. Citizens were called to "gather around (the veterans') sacred remains and garland the passionless mounds above them with choicest flowers of springtime," the official order read. "Let us raise above them the dear old flag they saved; let us

in this solemn presence renew our pledge to aid and to assist those whom they have left among us as a sacred charge upon the Nation's gratitude . . . " In some ways, that gratitude has grown. As Decoration Day evolved into Memorial Day, it embraced not only the veterans lost in the Civil War but eventually all wartime dead and, finally, deceased veterans of every stripe. Through AB134 and the hundreds of Nevada's volunteers who still perform this duty each year, we would continue this sacred duty.

I have submitted to the committee written testimony from Bill Brzezinski who has been one of the volunteers behind the awesome display at the Southern Nevada Veterans Memorial Cemetery since it's opening in 1990. He describes the challenges that have evolved from the initial 73 flags he and his fellow volunteers put out to the over 20,000 flags that are put out by hundreds of volunteers each Memorial Day and Veterans Day. His first-hand knowledge and insight offer that if Nevada were to provide a flag for each veteran within the state, the thousands of dollars currently raised in that effort could be used elsewhere. The task these volunteers have is unfathomable to many.

To give another viewpoint, Ron Gutzman has joined me today. He will enlighten you on the efforts of Carson City organizations to do the same at cemeteries throughout the area. But in contrast to both is our rural cemeteries. I spoke with Dale Salmen of Round Mountain this past weekend. For those members of the Committee who have not been initiated to the miles of Nevada's rural highways, Round Mountain is the geographic center of the state, past Fallon and the "shoe tree" on Highway 50 and an hour south of Austin. It may not be the end of the world, but you can see it over the hill.

The one-hundred members of the American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars in Round Mountain raise money each year through bingo games to purchase flags for veteran's graves in Kingston, Belmont, Round Mountain and Manhattan. The 120 veterans graves in these cemeteries are decorated with an American flag in a four hour processional each Memorial Day.

Truly AB134 will assist organizations and cemeteries throughout Nevada offer the final honors from a grateful nation. No matter how large, no matter how small, each veteran will be treated with the same honor and solemnity we can muster. It is the veterans' organizations, Girl Scouts, school children, and family members that will forever promise to memorialize the contributions of these heroes. The young men and women currently in harms way, the warriors of our past who rest in our cemeteries today, and these patriots that sit behind me today deserve nothing but our gratitude, our thanks and our actions for the heroic actions they selflessly rendered our country. On behalf of the Office of Veteran Services, the Veterans Service Organizations and all of Nevada's veterans and advocates, I urge you to pass Assembly Bill 134 for all of America's heroes.